

The Hindu



ANALYSIS

हिन्दी में



5th JUNE 2019



BY AMIT SAINI



Centre refuses to divulge CIC selection details

Defies SC order passed in February

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Centre has refused to reveal details of the ongoing selection process for four new Central Information Commissioners, despite a Supreme Court order directing it to do so.

The only information disclosed is that 256 people have applied for the four vacant positions, which were advertised five months ago.

In its reply to a Right to Information request, the Department of Personnel and Training claimed that the search committee's deliberations are exempted under the clause in the RTI Act allowing an exemption

for Cabinet papers.

"The government has failed to fill the posts of Information Commissioners in a timely and transparent manner, even ignoring the Supreme Court order," said Commodore Lokesh Batra (Retd.), who had filed the RTI request. He had asked for information on the number and names of the applicants for the vacant positions, adding that personal data on the applicants was not required.

He sought information on the procedure and criteria being applied for processing applicants and placing the names before the search/selection committee.



- The **Central Information Commission** (CIC) set up under the [Right to Information Act](#) is the authorised body, established in 2005, under the [Government of India](#) to act upon complaints from those individuals who have not been able to submit information requests to a Central Public Information Officer or State Public Information Officer due to either the officer not have been appointed, or because the respective Central Assistant Public Information Officer or State Assistant Public Information Officer refused to receive the application for information under the RTI Act.
- The Commission includes 1 Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and not more than 10 Information Commissioners (IC) who are appointed by the [President of India](#). The first Chief Information Commissioner of India was [Wajahat Habibullah](#). The present Chief Information Commissioner of India is [Sudhir Bhargava](#)
- CIC and members are **appointed by the President of India on the recommendation of a committee consisting of—**
- Prime Minister as Chairperson, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha; a Union Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister.
- There are two woman who became CIC till now first is Ms Deepak Sandhu (4th CIC) and Second Ms Sushma Singh(5th CIC)

Patients turn litigants as new rules stall therapy

Licence a must for stem cell treatment

- Several critically ill patients have been forced to line up at the Delhi High Court after they suddenly stopped getting medication following the implementation of the Centre's New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rule, 2019.
- The March 19 notification, issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, marked "stem cell derived products" under the definition of "new drugs". It also mandated that such formulations be approved by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO). The new rules require clinics engaged in such "new drug" therapy to acquire a marketing licence. But there is no provision for an interim arrangement for patients during the application process.
- A Bench of Justices G.S. Sistani and Jyoti Singh said that as an interim measure and till such time as the clinics' applications for licences are processed, the patients should continue to receive therapy from their clinics.

Kerala confirms one case of Nipah

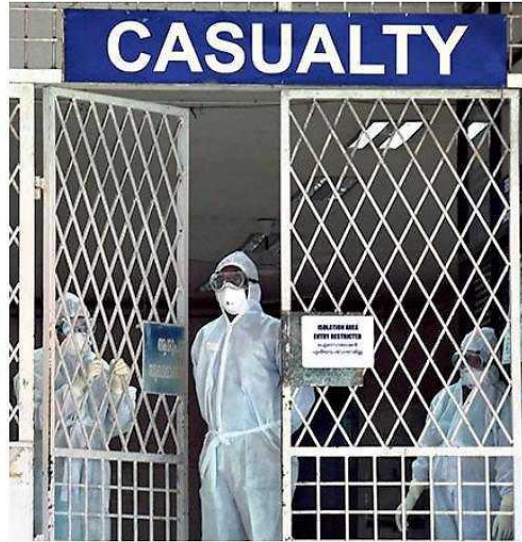


Four suspected cases have been quarantined

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOCHI

Nearly a year after the outbreak in Kozhikode and Malappuram, the deadly Nipah has resurfaced in Kerala. It has been confirmed that a 23-year-old college student here is infected.

“The test results have come from the National Institute of Virology, Pune, and it is positive for Nipah. The authorities have made elaborate arrangements, and medicines are in stock,” Health Minister K.K. Shylaja said



Health officials at an isolation ward of Ernakulam Medical College Hospital on Tuesday. ■ H. VIBHU

here on Tuesday.

She said 311 people from various districts with whom the student had interacted in recent times were under observation. Three persons

who attended to the student initially and one who studied with him were suffering from fever and sore throat. They had been shifted to an isolation ward set up at the Kalamassery Medical College Hospital here. Their health condition was satisfactory, authorities said.

Ms. Shylaja said the student, being treated at a private hospital here, was not on any life support systems. “Good care is being given to him. The patient sometimes becomes restless due to fever... We expect a good result.”

(With inputs from agencies)

MORE REPORTS ON ► PAGE 10

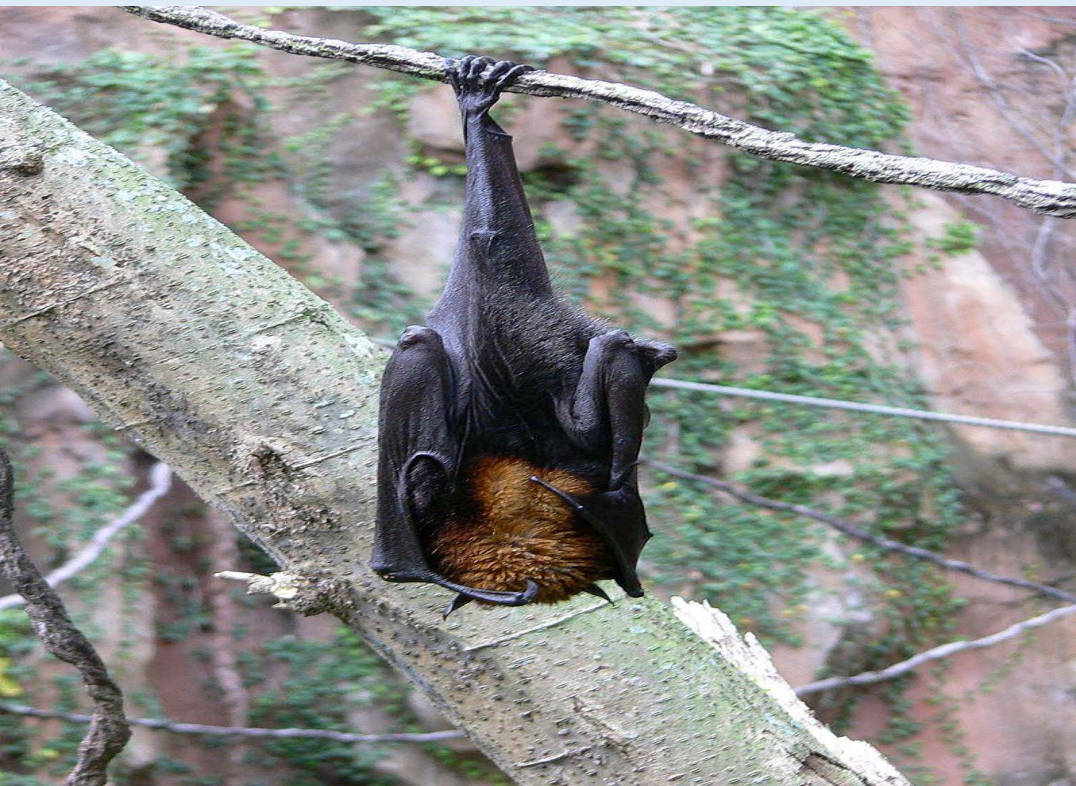
Nipah virus is one of the pathogens in the WHO R&D Blueprint list of epidemic threats needing urgent R&D action.

Nipah virus was first identified during an outbreak of disease that took place in **Malaysia** in **1998**.

Both animal-to-human and human-to-human transmission have been documented.

From 1998 to 2015, more than 600 cases of Nipah virus human infections were reported. Subsequent outbreaks in India and Bangladesh have occurred with high case fatality.

Henipavirus is a [genus](#) of [RNA viruses](#) in the [family Paramyxoviridae](#), [order Mononegavirales](#) containing five established species. Henipaviruses are naturally harboured by [pteropid fruit bats](#) (flying foxes) and [microbats](#) of several species. Henipaviruses are characterised by long [genomes](#) and a wide host range. Their recent emergence as [zoonotic](#) pathogens capable of causing illness and death in [domestic animals](#) and humans is a cause of concern



Fruit bats are the natural reservoirs of Nipah virus



- The risk of exposure is high for hospital workers and caretakers of those infected with the virus.
- In Malaysia and Singapore, Nipah virus infection occurred in those with close contact to **infected pigs**.
- In Bangladesh and India, the disease has been linked to consumption of raw **date palm sap (toddy)** and contact with **bats**
- Laboratory diagnosis of Nipah virus infection is made using reverse transcriptase [polymerase chain reaction](#) (RT-PCR) from [throat swabs](#), [cerebrospinal fluid](#), urine and blood analysis during acute and convalescent stages of the disease.
- [IgG](#) and [IgM](#) antibody detection can be done after recovery to confirm Nipah virus infection. [Immunohistochemistry](#) on tissues collected during autopsy also confirms the disease.
- RNA can be isolated from the saliva of infected persons

An experimental Ebola cure may also protect against Nipah virus



Four out of eight monkeys infected with the virus survived after Remdesivir dose

DONALD G. MCNEIL JR.

An experimental drug has protected monkeys against infection with Nipah virus, a lethal disease and emerging pandemic threat for which there is no approved vaccine or cure, scientists reported on Wednesday.

The antiviral drug, Remdesivir, is also being tested against the Ebola virus in the outbreak now under way in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The only current treatment for Nipah virus infection is a monoclonal antibody that is still experimental; it was tested during an outbreak in India last year.

In the new trial, eight African green monkeys were given lethal doses of Nipah virus. Half of them later got intravenous Remdesivir. All



Checking spread: If approved, the drug will be an extra line of treatment that could be used quickly. ■GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

four monkeys that got the drug survived; the four that did not died within eight days.

If the drug wins approval for use against Nipah, “it will give us an extra treatment that could be used relatively quickly,” said Emmie de Wit, a virologist at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and one of the

study’s lead authors. “The average person who reaches a hospital dies within two days, so it’s hard to protect them once they’re infected.”

Ebola and Nipah belong to different viral families, but Remdesivir – made by Gilead Sciences and also known as GS-5734 – appears effective against both.

In mice or cells cultivated

in the laboratory, the drug has also shown some effectiveness against two other pandemic threats: Lassa fever and MERS coronavirus. It is also effective against Respiratory Syncytial virus, which infects children all over the world.

Although the outer shells of all these viruses are very different, their polymerases – the genome-copying enzyme that Remdesivir targets – are similar, Ms. de Wit explained.

The study, done jointly by the NIAID and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, was published in *Science Translational Medicine*.

Nipah virus, which causes encephalitis and pneumonia, is lethal in about 70% of cases. NY TIMES

India at 95 on Gender Index

It is among 43 nations under 'very poor' category

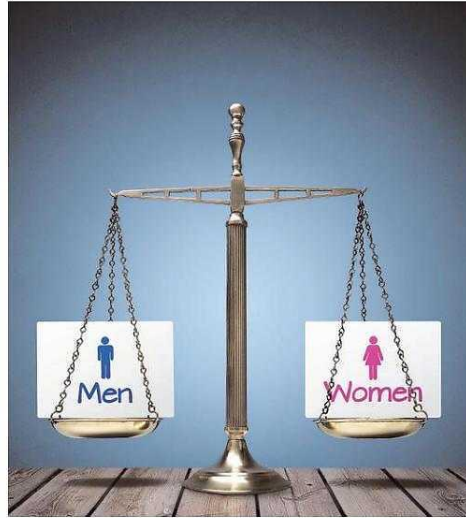
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

India ranked 95th out of a total 129 countries in the first-ever SDG Gender Index, which measures strides made in achieving gender commitments against internationally set targets.

The index has been developed by Equal Measures 2030.

The index finds that no country has fully achieved the promise of gender equality and that the global average score of 65.7 out of 100 is "poor". This means that almost 1.4 billion, or 40%, of the world's girls and women live in countries failing on gender equality and another 1.4 billion live in countries



India scored highest on health (79.9) and hunger (76.2). ■ ISTOCKPHOTO

that barely pass.

Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, Slovenia, Germany, Canada, Ireland, and Australia rank as the top 10 countries in the index, while the bottom 10

comprise Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Yemen, Congo, DR Congo and Chad.

A score of 100 indicates the achievement of gender equality in relation to the underlying indicators. A score of 50 would indicate that a country is about half-way to meeting its goal. India's score of 56.2 means that it is among 43 countries in the 'very poor' category.

India scores the highest in health (79.9), followed by hunger (76.2) and energy (71.8). Among the SDGs, on which the country performs poorly are partnerships (18.3), industry, infrastructure and innovation (38.1) and climate (43.4).

Food safety is everyone's business: WHO

An estimated 600 million cases of food-borne diseases occur annually around the world

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

“Food safety is everyone’s business,” says the World Health Organisation (WHO) which has released figures that estimate 600 million cases of food-borne diseases occur annually worldwide. This translates into one in 10 people falling ill after eating contaminated food.

“Food safety is an increasing threat to human health. Children under 5 years of age carry 40% of the food-borne disease burden with 1,25,000 deaths every year,” said WHO.

A note issued by the organisation said the first-ever World Food Safety Day was



Common cause: Access to safe food is key to sustaining life and promoting good health. ■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in December 2018 and this year it would be celebrated on June 7 with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) facilitating

member-States’ effort to celebrate it.

“Access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food is key to sustaining life and promoting good

health. Food-borne diseases impede socio-economic development by straining health care systems and harming national economies, tourism and trade,” it said.

Food is the starting point for our energy, our health and our well-being. We often take for granted that it is safe, but in an increasingly complex and interconnected world where food value chains are growing longer, standards and regulations are that much more important in keeping us safe.

“The way in which food is produced, stored, handled and consumed affects the safety of our food. Complying

with global food standards, establishing effective regulatory food control systems, including emergency preparedness and response, providing access to clean water, applying good agriculture practices (terrestrial, aquatic, livestock, horticulture), strengthening the use of food safety management systems by food business operators, and building capacities of consumers to make healthy food choices are some ways in which governments, international organisations, scientists, the private sector and civil society can work to ensure food safety,” the health organisation noted.

'India joblessness data not factored into World Bank growth estimates'



Investment figures, manufacturing weaker than expected

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON DC

The new macroeconomic data released by the government last Friday, which showed joblessness for 2017/18 at 6.1%, a 45-year high, was not factored into the World Bank Group's June 2019 Global Economic Prospects (GEP) report, Ayhan Kose, Director of the Bank's Global Prospects Group told *The Hindu*, during a briefing call with reporters.

"This data is rather new. Obviously we have not [taken] it into account ... our cut off date for the data as we indicated in the report is May 23 [2019]. Having said that, India's GDP growth slowed to 5.8% in the first quarter [of 2019] from 6.6% in the previous quarter," Mr. Kose said. "Manufacturing activity and investment fi-



■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

gures were weaker than expected." This, Mr. Kose said, was attributable to the uncertainty in the run-up to the elections and was "somewhat expected."

India's growth forecasts are projected to be 7.5% per annum in 2019, 2020 and 2021 – not having been downgraded from their January estimates. A growth rate of 7.2% is estimated for

2018. In its 2014-2019 term, the NDA government had faced criticism over its handling of data. For instance, the unemployment data from the National Sample Survey Office, leaked in January, was officially released only last week, post-elections. In January, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation published revised GDP growth numbers for 2017, showing an increase of 1.1%, with growth pegged at 8.2%.

In March, 108 economists and social scientists from around the world, wrote an open letter 'Economic Statistics in Shambles' to highlight the data credibility problem.

World Bank representatives did not wish to comment on the data credibility issue during Tuesday's briefing call.

- The **Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO)** is a statutory corporate fraud investigating agency in [India](#). Initially, it was set up by a resolution adopted by the Government of India on 2 July 2003 and carried out investigations within the existing legal framework under section 235 to 247 of the erstwhile Companies Act, 1956. Later, Section 211 of the Companies Act, 2013, accorded the statutory status to the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO). It is under the jurisdiction of the [Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India](#). The SFIO is involved in major fraud probes and is the co-ordinating agency with the Income Tax Department and the [Central Bureau of Investigation](#).
- It is a multi-disciplinary organization having experts from financial sector, capital market, accountancy, forensic audit, taxation, law, information technology, company law, customs and investigation. These experts have been taken from various organizations like banks, [Securities and Exchange Board of India](#), [Comptroller and Auditor General](#) and concerned organizations and departments of the Government.
- Based on the recommendation of [Naresh Chandra](#) Committee on corporate governance (which was set up by the Government on 21 August 2002) and in the backdrop of stock market scams as also the failure of non-banking companies resulting in huge financial loss to the public, [Vajpayee Government](#) decided to set up SFIO on 9 January 2003

RBI study moots boost to acceptance infra for digital payments

'Need to cut volume of paper-clearing'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI
While there has been robust growth in the volume of retail electronic transactions amid a strong regulatory framework, the country needs to enhance its payments acceptance infrastructure, a study on digital payments by the Reserve Bank of India has observed.



The findings are from a report on 'Benchmarking India's Payment Systems', which provides a comparison of the payment ecosystem in India with the payment systems and usage trends in other major countries.

The central bank had undertaken the exercise of benchmarking India's payment systems vis-à-vis payment systems in a mix of advanced economies, Asian economies and the BRICS nations.

Robust value

"The study found that India has a strong regulatory system and robust large value and retail payment systems, which have contributed to the rapid growth in the volume of transactions in these payment systems," RBI said.

"The report, however, notes that India is required to take further efforts to bring down the volume of paper-clearing and increase acceptance infrastructure to enhance digital payments," the RBI said.

The data used for the benchmarking were mostly for the years 2012 and 2017.

While the report acknowledged that the growth in the volume of payment systems transactions had been strong and steady, the relatively high level of cash in circulation offered scope for a higher level of digitisation of payments, it said.

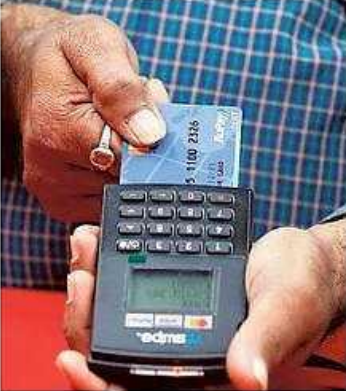
"There is an increase in Point of Sale (PoS) terminals, including mobile terminals, which, however, may not be enough to cater

RBI study moots boost to acceptance infra for digital payments

'Need to cut volume of paper-clearing'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

While there has been robust growth in the volume of retail electronic transactions amid a strong regulatory framework, the country needs to enhance its payments acceptance infrastructure, a study on digital payments by the Reserve Bank of India has observed.



The findings are from a report on 'Benchmarking India's Payment Systems', which provides a comparison of the payment ecosystem in India with the payment systems and usage trends in other major countries.

The central bank had undertaken the exercise of benchmarking India's payment systems vis-à-vis payment systems in a mix of advanced economies, Asian economies and the BRICS nations.

to the large population," the report said.

The report observed low digital payment of utility bills, despite the existence of the Bharat Bill Payment System (BBPS), an integrated interoperable bill payment system which started live operations from October 12, 2017.

'Lag in broadband infra'

The report also said digital communications infrastructure in the form of a robust

ment systems vis-à-vis payment systems in a mix of advanced economies, Asian economies and the BRICS nations.

Robust value

"The study found that India has a strong regulatory system and robust large value and retail payment systems, which have contributed to the rapid growth in the volume of transactions in these payment systems," RBI said.

"The report, however, notes that India is required to take further efforts to bring down the volume of paper-clearing and increase acceptance infrastructure to enhance digital payments," the RBI said.

The data used for the benchmarking were mostly for the years 2012 and 2017.

While the report acknowledged that the growth in the volume of payment systems transactions had been strong and steady, the relatively high level of cash in circulation offered scope for a higher level of digitisation of payments, it said.

"There is an increase in Point of Sale (PoS) terminals, including mobile terminals, which, however, may not be enough to cater

'Lag in broadband infra'

The report also said digital communications infrastructure in the form of a robust mobile network is growing strongly, though broadband infrastructure "lags behind."

The report highlighted that the last few years since demonetisation have witnessed a sea change in the payments landscape, with large growth in digital payments.

In 2018-19, the volume growth of retail electronic transactions was 95%, compared to 51% in the previous year, mainly due to the steep growth in the use of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), the report said.

The report also said that the level of credit card penetration in India was low when compared to advanced countries, where it was a preferred option for making payments.

"To encourage usage of cards, card infrastructure is required to be robust, strong and secure. Further, the last-mile availability of PoS terminals is relatively lower in India and much needs to be done in this regard," it added.

- **Bharat Bill Payment System (BBPS)** is an integrated bill payment system in [India](#) offering interoperable and accessible bill payment service to customers through a network of agents of registered member as Agent Institutions (AI), enabling multiple payment modes, and providing instant confirmation of payment.
- [National Payments Corporation of India](#) (NPCI) functions as the authorised Bharat Bill Payment Central Unit (BBPCU), which will be responsible for setting business standards, rules and procedures for technical and business requirements for all the participants. NPCI, as the BBPCU, will also undertake clearing and settlement activities related to transactions routed through BBPS. Existing bill aggregators and banks are envisaged to work as Operating Units to provide an interoperable bill payment system irrespective of which unit has on-boarded a particular biller. Payments may be made through the BBPS using cash, transfer cheques, and electronic modes

Global growth to slow in 2019, says WB



Forecasts for India through 2021 remain intact; prognosis for impact of U.S.-China trade tensions grim

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON DC

The World Bank Group has downgraded global real GDP growth to 2.6% for 2019, down by 0.3 percentage points from its previous forecast in January. Growth is expected to increase marginally to 2.7% in 2020. India's growth forecasts are projected to be 7.5% per annum in 2019, 2020 and 2021 - not having been downgraded from their January estimates.

The multilateral development bank's June 2019 Global Economic Prospects (GEP) report, titled, 'Heightened Tensions, Subdued Investment' says the global economy "has continued to soften and momentum remains weak" and investment, sluggish.

Downside risks to global growth, as per the report, include rising trade barriers, a build-up of government debt and slowdowns that were deeper-than-expected in sev-



All is not well: Downside risks to global growth include rising trade barriers, build-up of government debt. ■ K.R. DEEPAK

eral major economies. Sluggishness of investment in Emerging Markets Developing Economies is part of a protracted (barring the 2016-2018 recovery) slowdown following the global financial crisis, as per the report.

"Stronger economic growth is essential to reducing poverty and improving living standards," said World Bank Group President David Malpass, in a statement.

"Current economic momentum remains weak, while heightened debt levels and subdued investment growth in developing economies are holding countries back from achieving their potential. It's urgent that countries make significant structural reforms that improve the business climate and attract investment. They also need to make debt management and transparency a high priority

so that new debt adds to growth and investment."

Slowdown in U.S.

Advanced economies, as a group, are expected to slow down in 2019, particularly the Euro area, due to weaker investments and exports.

U.S. growth is expected to slow to 2.5% this year, down from an estimated 2.9% in 2018, and then down to 1.7% and 1.6% in 2020 and 2021, respectively. In India, where growth was 7.2% in FY2018/2019, investment – both, private and in public infrastructure – offset a slowdown in government consumption.

Economic activity slowed in the last quarter of 2018, and spilled over into the first quarter of 2019.

India's growth at a projected 7.5% is supported by credit growth and an accommodative monetary policy. "Support from delays in planned fiscal consolidation

at the central level should partially offset the effects of political uncertainty around elections," the report says.

"The continuing weakness in corporate and financial sector balance sheets remain a constraint for growth despite recent improvements in the Ease of Doing Business in India," Ayhan Kose, Director of the World Bank's Prospects Group said to *The Hindu*, in a conference call with reporters to discuss the forecasts.

The prognosis for the impact of U.S.-China trade tensions is grim. "... adverse effects from weakening growth and rising policy uncertainties involving the world's two largest economies would have predominantly negative repercussions," it says. A no-deal Brexit could have 'severe impact' on the U.K. and to a lower extent, on its European trading partners in the event of disruptions and delays at the border.

Prasar Bharati will retain its autonomy: Javadekar

His predecessor, Smriti Irani, had run-ins with broadcaster

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

State broadcaster Prasar Bharati's autonomy will be retained, Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar said on Tuesday after launching high-definition DSNG (digital satellite news gathering) vans at Doordarshan Bhavan in New Delhi.

"Autonomy of the Prasar Bharati is important and one must remember it gets its autonomy from an Act that was brought in post-Emergency to ensure that no one can tamper with its autonomy. And we too want that work smoothly and bring new programmes and find new dimensions," he said.

Mr. Javadekar's comments assume significance against the backdrop of former Information and Broadcasting Minister Smriti Irani's constant run-ins with the state broadcaster. Last February, rejecting certain



Prakash Javadekar

directives issued by the Ministry, Prasar Bharati Chairman Surya Prakash sought to remind the government that the organisation was an "autonomous" body and deciding on its behalf would amount to contempt of the Prasar Bharati Act.

'Credible programmes'

Mr. Javadekar lauded Doordarshan (DD) and All India Radio (AIR) for their credible programmes and coverage, and asked officials to promote channels such as DD Bharati.

He said the new vans would help DD in collection of high-quality visuals from outdoor spots.

DD News has acquired 17 high-definition DSNG vans, which are capable of transmitting signal in HD and multi-camera production.

Mr. Prakash said the public broadcaster was moving ahead in the direction of the "Sabka Vishwas" policy propounded by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Information and Broadcasting Secretary Amit Khare said a three-year plan had been approved by the government to develop the infrastructure of Prasar Bharati at a cost of ₹1,054 crore.

"There are many channels in the country that claim to be the fastest, but DD and AIR command the highest credibility."

DD and AIR have the highest numbers of viewers and listeners in the country, he noted.



Prasar Bharati is [India](#)'s largest public broadcasting agency. It is a statutory autonomous body set up by an Act of Parliament and comprises the [Doordarshan Television Network](#) and [All India Radio](#), which were earlier media units of the [Ministry of Information and Broadcasting](#). The [Parliament of India](#) passed the Prasar Bharati Act to grant this autonomy in 1990, but it was not enacted until 15 September 1997

- The Prasar Bharati Act vests the general superintendence, direction, and management of affairs of the Corporation in the Prasar Bharati Board which may exercise all such powers and do all such acts and things as may be exercised or done by the Corporation.
- The Prasar Bharati Board consists of:
 - Chairman
 - One Executive Member
 - One Member (Finance)
 - One Member (Personnel)
 - Six Part-time Members
 - Director-General ([Akashvani](#)), **ex officio**
 - Director-General ([Doordarshan](#)), **ex officio**
 - One representative of the Union [Ministry of Information and Broadcasting \(India\)](#), to be nominated by that Ministry and
 - Two representatives of the employees , of whom one shall be elected by the engineering staff from amongst themselves and one shall be elected by the other employee from amongst themselves.
- **The President of India appoints the Chairman and the other Members, except the ex officio members**, nominated member and the elected members.
- Board meetings must be held at least once in every three months each year. The actress [Kajol](#) has been named as part-time member for five years, until November 2021